DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 195 882 CG 014 834

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TITLE Preference for Pastoral Counseling Roles as Perceived by Male and Female Adults.
PUB DATE Mar 80
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association (26th, Washington, DC, March 26-29, 1980).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Adults; *Attitude Measures; *Church Role; *Clergy; *Counseling Services; *Family Relationship; Questionnaires; *Sex Differences; Social Services; Spouses

ABSTRACT

Forty-six adults responded to a questionnaire in which they ranked their preferred counseling person in four problem areas: home or work, children, spiritual matters, and marital problems. Males' first choice in all areas was their spouse; females chose their spouse for work and child problems, their pastor for spiritual matters, and themselves for marital problems. Results from the opinionnaire indicate a desire for trained counselors in local churches. A female counselor was preferred by 59% of the females and 34% of the males. In most churches, counseling services were offered only by pastors. There appears to be a need not only for trained counselors in churches but for women in this role. (Author/CS)

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ED195882

# PREFERENCE FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING ROLES AS PERCEIVED BY MALE AND FEMALE ADULTS

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Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Southeastern Psychological Association, March 26-29, 1980, Washington, DC.

CG 014834

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Presented at SEPA, Washington, 1980

# PREFERENCE FOR PASTORAL COUNSELING ROLES AS PERCEIVED BY MALE AND FEMALE ADULTS

Religious personnel commonly believe that there is an overwhelming preference for them to act in the role as counselor when adults seek counseling services. The purpose of this study was to determine the most preferred type of counseling person chosen by adult members of various church congregations. Primary focus was on the types of problems in which an adult might experience a need for counseling service and their preference for using services provided in local church settings and labeled as pastoral counseling.

Butts (1965) states that being a pastor who counsels is not so much a matter of learning the right techniques, as it is in approaching the matter of one's total ministry with a certain attitude. The pastoral minister is not just a counselor to the exclusion of the other responsibilities of his office, so there is present some ambivalence in the role of the pastor who counsels.

Although states vary in the laws regarding pastoral counseling services offered to the public, many pastors view their role as a dual one involving active service to their congregation's spiritual needs and to their personal concerns and problems. Throughout the 60's and 70's, within the

Community Health movement, the concept of paraprofessional counselors gained support. Counselors are seen as sensitive, perceptive, non-judgmental people who are capable of continued growth, who have the ability to select a helpful response and who are able to help the client identify and express feelings(Carkhuff, 1972). Carl Rogers (1957) identified empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard as the necessary and sufficient conditions for client growth. Carkhuff (1971, 1972) refined Roger's approach to training paraprefessional counselors by teaching them to communicate the core conditions of interpersonal effectiveness in two dimensions: facilitative and action. The facilitative dimension includes empathy, respect, warmth and concreteness. The action dimension includes genuineness, self-disclosure, confrontation and immediacy. Carkhuff also described verbal and non-verbal counselor behaviors which communicate these conditions. Crucial to effective counseling is learning to serve as models for clients. Paraprofessional possessing these characteristics will be sought out by people who need their helping skills.

Method

Forty six adults who were regular in church attendance responded to the questionnaire which specified four common problem areas for adults: child-related problems; marital problems; home (work) problems; and spiritual problems. Nine

helpful persons were listed as possible choices to which an adult might turn for counseling. The participants were instructed in the test taking procedure by a cover sheet which contained the rationale for the study- determining the person to whom the subject would most readily turn for help in each area listed. The subjects who participated in the study were volunteers who responded to the request made by an adult member of their church, who had been contacted for that purpose.

The subjects consisted of 33 females,whose age range was from 21-60 years of age, with the mean age = 31; married; 27 White and 6 Black; 30 Protestant (Baptist, Lutheran, Methodist, Holiness, Disciples, Pentacostal, Eastern) and 3 Catholic. The 13 male subjects, whose age range was from 25-63, with the mean age = 35; were married, Protestant and White.

The subjects were requested to rank order the person to whom they would turn in each of the four areas listed, in times of problems. The nine helpful persons were presented in a counterbalanced manner across the areas. These persons were pastor, friend, spouse, parent, brother/sister, teacher, deacon/vestry, church staff and psychologist/psychiatrist. If none of these were chosen a space was provided which stated: I always work out these problems alone. An opinion of projected services was also included which asked whether the subject thought persons trained in counseling should be pro-

vided by churches, who would be responsible for the payment of these services and the sex preference for the counselor providing the service.

Results

The results obtained on the problem areas of the questionnaire were hand scored and tabulated by rank order and Spearman's Rho was used where applicable. A significant Rho was obtained in child related problems $\rho = .941$, $p < .01$, with the choice of spouse as the most helpful person. This was the only area which reached significance. Chi square was used to tabulate results obtained on the opinion section of the questionnaire. Although it indicates there is a desire on the part of the adults that churches have a trained counselor for adults ( $X^2 = 8.39$, $p < .01$), there was no significance on method of payment. The sex of the preferred counselor, though not statistically significant, endorsed a preference for a female counselor, with 59% of the females giving this response and 34% of the males not listing a male preference.

Discussion

Family cohesiveness is indicated in the mutual choice of spouse by female and male subjects as their most preferred person in time of problems. Implied in this choice is the preference to stay within the family unit or self with problems and choices of outsiders limited to five other

pesons out of the possible nine choices of helpful persons. Some outsiders are further enlargements of the family: brother/sister and parents; then friend, pastor and church staff. The pastor may be the most objectively trained individual chosen and he was regarded as the first/second choice only in spiritual matters.

The absence of choice of trained professional people as psychologists/psychiatrists arouses speculation as to the possible reluctance to accept outside intervention, or a reluctance to pay for help or simply a lack of contact with these persons may prevent them from being a viable choice to the subjects. The church staff was chosen by females in child related problems and may be due to the availablity of youth counselors in many churches. The deacon/vestry were never chosen. Since they are laity, elected by the laity to this office, and dedicated to service, this requires further definition.

The most interesting feature of the combined tables is the attitude of the male subjects. Their first choice in all areas was their spouse, and this may indicate a working together on problems which much of literature tends to deny. The male prefers his spouse over the pastor in spiritual matters, while the female choice is pastor over spouse.

The 2nd/3rd choice of self in all areas except spiritual may imply a feeling of trustworthiness of individual opinion. The conformity of responses by both male and female subjects suggests personal adjustment to the existing social world with its roles, statuses and norms.

The opinion section of the questionnaire revealed a preference for a trained female counselor by 59% of the female subjects. Though most churches today do not offer counseling services to their adult congregation, except through pastors, there appears to be a need not only for the service, but for the addition of a trained woman in a counseling role. The implication is made that the adult woman in churches is not having her needs met by the existing services offered by male church pastors and staff, since there is no woman in this position in the area. The female, when problems arise in child, home, or marital areas, must turn elsewhere to find the same sex counselor.

## COUNSELING ROLES

Helpful People as Chosen by Females and Males in Child Related, Marital, Work (Home) and Spiritual Problems

| People | Areas Percentage | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Child | | Marital | | Work (Home) | | Spiritual | |
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| Spouse | 73 | 52 | 60 | 40 | 67 | 40 | 41.7 | 22.5 |
| Parents | 9 | 28 | 10 | 4 | 8 | 9 | 0 | 3.3 |
| Deacon/Vestry | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Church Staff | 0 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Psychologist/ Psychiatrist | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Teacher | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Brother/Sister | 0 | 3 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Friend | 0 | 3 | 0 | 8 | 17 | 12 | 8.6 | 16 |
| Pastor | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 3 | 33 | 32 |
| Self | 18 | 11 | 30 | 40 | 8 | 27 | 16.7 | 19 |

Comparison of Female and Male Opinions Concerning Adult Counseling Services in a Church

| Question | Frequency (Percentage) Agree | | Disagree | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | M | F | M | F |
| 1. The church should provide trained counselors to assist adult members during problem times. | 92.3 | 84.4 | 7.7 | 15.6* |
| 2. The counselor should be a paid member of the church staff. | 47.4 | 69.7 | 52.6 | 30.3 |
| 3. The counselor should not be paid by the church but by the person receiving help. | 27.2 | 20 | 72.8 | 80 |
| 4. I would prefer a counselor of my own sex. | 66 | 59 | 33 | 41 |

*Chi Square = 8.39
$p < .01$

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